

All I Wanted To Do Was Dance

I haven't danced
in years
Indian or white
but when you asked
I didn't hesitate
and moved
onto the floor with you

feeling hopeful and hopeless. How can I say this and mean it? How can I say this and make it seem real? I have never danced with an Indian woman. No, that's not exactly true. I have owl danced with my mother and sisters. You know the owl dance. The woman asks the man to dance and if he says no, he has to pay the woman what she wants and also stand in front of the entire crowd at the dance and explain why he refused. Let's reverse the tradition for a moment, enough time for me

to ask you to dance
and if you refuse
you'll have to tell me
why
and you'll pay me
five dollars
enough for gas money
back
to my previous life
back

to that moment when I read my love poem for the white woman while you sat with another Indian woman, all three of you beautiful, listening. Believe me, I remember you in your red shirt. Maybe you don't even own a red shirt; maybe you've never worn a red shirt. But in my memory all I can see was that red shirt, your dark eyes and skin. Your hair was black, long, perfect, and suddenly I wanted braids. I wanted to tell you that I knew enough of my language to say *I love you*

if it ever came to that moment
if you ever asked me
to cross that river
between us
not across some bridge
real or metaphor
but on the backs of salmon
all of us
terrified and amazed.